

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3858

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 8990

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINR, TH

SUBJ: GOVERNMENT DECIDES ON COURT PROSECUTION  
FOR TUNG YAI HUNTING SCANDAL PARTICIPANTS

SUMMARY: RTG HAS ACCEPTED JUSTICE MINISTER'S INVESTIGATIVE REPORT OF THE POLITICAL SCANDAL INVOLVING MILITARY AND POLICE OFFICERS, AND PROMINENT BUSINESSMEN, HUNTING IN PROTECTED WILD GAME PRESERVE, AND DECIDED TO TRY NINE PARTICIPANTS IN THE COURTS. THESE MOVES HAVE LARGELY DEFUSED THE POLITICAL SCANDAL THAT HAS SIMMERED FOR THE LAST MONTH, AND AS OF NOW IT APPEARS DOUBTFUL THAT THERE WILL BE FURTHER SIGNIFICANT AGITATION ON THE CASE. END SUMMARY.

1. FOR THE PAST SIX WEEKS THE PRESS HAS BRIMMED WITH THE MOST SUSTAINED POLITICAL SCANDAL TO HIT THAILAND IN A DECADE -- THE CASE OF SENIOR MILITARY AND POLICE OFFICERS, AND PROMINENT BUSINESSMEN, POACHING ON THE TUNG YAI NATIONAL GAME PRESERVE AND KILLING PROTECTED WILD GAME. FOR SUSTAINED HIGH FEVER NEWS COVERAGE AND EXCORIATING EDITORIAL COMMENT, AND IMPASSIONED STUDENT INVOLVEMENT, BANGKOK HAS NOT SEEN ANUTHING LIKE IT SINCE THE POSTHUMOUS REVELATIONS IN 1963 OF FIELD MARSHAL SARIT THANNARAT'S VAST WEALTH AND LARGE HAREM OF MINOR WIVES.

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2. THE CASE ORIGINALLY BROKE WHEN A THAI ARMY HELICOPTER CARRYING SOME OF THE HUNTING PARTY CRASHED WEST OF BANGKOK. BECAUSE OF THE ODD MIX OF SOME METROPOLITAN POLICE OFFICERS AND A TEENAGE SON, ABOARD THE CRAFT IN ADDITION TO ARMY OFFICERS, THE GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPTED EXPLANATIONS OF A "SECRET MISSION" MET PUBLIC SCORN. AFTER SEVERAL WEEKS OF INCREASINGLY LAME COVER-UP STATEMENTS, THE RTG HAS DECIDED TO PROSECUTE NINE PARTICIPANTS FOR ILLEGAL HUNTING. THE CHARGES COME AS A RESULT OF A SPECIAL INVESTIGATION HEADED BY JUSTICE MINISTER KAMOL WANNAPRAPHA. THE NINE ACCUSED ARE: LTC SUPAT SARASIN, SPECIAL SIDE TO FIELD MARSHAL PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN (AND SON OF POTE SARASIN); COL. AMNUAY KISUWANA, CHIEF OF THE ARMY AIR TRANSPORT, LTC CHAMNONG RODCHAROEN OF THE 11 TH INFANTRY REGIMENT; OLYMPIC MARKSMAN POL. COL. AMORN YUKTANANT, DEPUTY COMMANDER OF THE BANGKOK SOUTH POLICE; POL. COL. KOSAL LIMPICHART, CHIEF OF THE METROPOLITAN POLICE RADIO PATROL UNIT; MR. PHANAS THEPHASDIN NA AYUTTHAYA, A WEALTHY BUSINESSMAN, MR. OPART BULKUL, ALSO PROMINENT BUSINESSMAN; MOVIE ACTRESS METTA ROONGRATH, AND A HAPLESS KAREN TRIBESMAN WHO GUIDED THE REST OF THE PARTY. FIELD MARSHAL PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN, DIR. GEN. OF NATIONAL POLICE, HAS PROMISED PUBLICLY THAT THE INVESTIGATION WILL FOLLOW ALL REGULAR PROCEDURES.

3. SUPREME COURT JUSTICES HAVE MENTIONED TO US THAT THEY INTERPRET THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO MEAN THAT THERE WILL BE NO POLITICAL INTERFERENCE IN THE LEGAL PROCESSES, AND THAT IF THE POLICE AND PROSECUTOR PRODUCE ENOUGH EVIDENCE, JUSTICE WILL BE ALLOWED TO RUN ITS COURSE.

4. JUSTICE MINISTER KAMOL APPEARS TO HAVE TREADED SUCCESSFULLY A VERY NARROW AND HAZARDOUS PATH, RETAINING THE PUBLIC'S CONFIDENCE FOR THE APPARENTLY THOROUGH JOB HE HAS DONE, AND ALSO THE CONFIDENCE OF THE POWER HIERARCHY FOR NOT HAVING BROADENED HIS INVESTIGATIONS AND THEREBY POSSIBLY ENLARGED THE SCANDAL. NOT SURPRISINGLY, HE HAS WON THE COMPLETE ADMIRATION OF THE JUDICIARY FOR HIS VIGOROUS REPORT WHICH CONVINCED THE GOVERNMENT TO PROSECUTE THE CASE THROUGH THE COURT SYSTEM.

5. ASIDE FROM THE POLITICAL SCANDAL IT HAS CREATED, THE  
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SPECIFIC CRIME OF POACHING IN THE GAME PRESERVE IS NOT TERRIBLY SERIOUS UNDER THAI LAW, AND IS PUNISHABLE BY A FINE AND/OR BRIEF (UP TO TWO YEARS) IMPRISONMENT. IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY AT THIS JUNCTURE THAT IF CONVICTED THE NINE ACCUSED WILL RECEIVE SUSPENDED SENTENCES.

6. THE KAMOL REPORT, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO

SEND THE CASE TO THE COURST HAS ALL BUT COMPLETELY DEFUSED THE CASE POLITICALLY. BY THE TIME THE CASE IS TRIED ( NO TIME FRAME YET), PUBLIC INDIGNATION WILL MOST LIKELY HAVE ABATED COMPLETELY, OR BEEN REDIRECTED. THUS, NO MATTER WHAT THE COURT DECIDES, THERE APPEARS LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF RENEWED LARGE SCALE AGITATION AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT ON THE CASE.

7. COMMENT: WHAT IT BOILS DOWN TO IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT LOST CONSIDERABLE PRESTIGE OVER THE MISBEHAVIOR OF HIGH OFFICIALS, AND EVEN MORE OVER THE WAY IT TRIED TO COVER FOR THEM WHEN THE EVIDENCE AND THE PUBLIC INDIGNATION WAS OVERWHELMING.

HOWEVER, THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF THIS CASE IS THAT LOUD AND UNANIMOUS STUDENT AND PRESS AGITATION FORCED THE GOVERNMENT INTO DOING WHAT IT MANIFESTLY DID NOT WANT TO DO-- INVESTIGATE THE CASE THOROUGHLY AND BRING THE OFFENDERS TO JUSTICE.

IT IS ALSO SIGNIFICANT THAT THIS ISSUE HAS PROVOKED THE MOST HIGHLY POLITICAL UTTERANCE MADE BY THE ROYAL FAMILY IN RECENT MEMORY. PRINCESS SIRINDHORN BROKE ROYAL TRADITION TO GIVE A PRESS INTERVIEW FOLLOWING HER TOP PLACEMENT IN THE NATIONAL MS 5 ( END OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ) FINAL EXAMS; SHE ALL BUT SHATTERED TRADITION BY SPEAKING OUT ON A MAJOR CURRENT SCANDAL AND CRITICIZING DIRECTLY SPECIFIC BEHAVIOR OF IDENTIFIABLE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. SHE SPOKE OUT AGAINST GAME HUNTING IN GENERAL SAYING IT WAS A ONE SIDED SLAUGHTER, AND IN PARTICULAR AGAINST USING AN OFFICIAL HELICOPTER TO DO SO WHEN THEY ARE SO BADLY NEEDED TO RUSH INJURED BORDER PARTORL POLICEMENT TO HOSPITALS FOR LIFE AND DEATH MEDICAL TREATMENT. HER REMARKS LEFT LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE KING

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HIMSELF AGREED WITH AND APPROVED OF THEM.  
MASTERS

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